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ABSTRACT

A survey identified professional roles and activities which were considered areas of difficulty for first year home economics teachers. Seven roles were considered, involving the teacher as: (1) planner; (2) director and helper of learning; (3) counselor and guide to the students; (4) mediator and interpretor of the culture; (5) a link with the community; (6) member of the teaching profession; and (7) member of the school community. Respondents also rated the difficulty of six professional activities: (1) working in a mainstreamed situation; (2) managing learning laboratory settings; (3) obtaining instructional equipment, supplies, and materials; (4) providing career education; (5) working in extra class activities; and (6) providing a broad range of content and activities. The role ranked as being of the greatest difficulty was "teacher as a link with the community," followed by "teacher as a mediator and interpretor of the culture." These rankings, when compared with those made by teachers in seven other curricular areas, revealed a similar pattern regarding the two teacher roles considered most difficult. The home economics teachers ranked "obtaining instructional equipment, supplies, and materials" as the area of highest professional difficulty. (JD)

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PROFESSIONAL ROLE PERFORMANCE DIFFICULTIES REPORTED BY FIRST YEAR HOME ECONOMICS TEACHERS IN ILLINOIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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The professional performance of teachers is perhaps the most important variable in facilitating school-based learning and, thereby, a determinant of the success of school programs.

Morsh and Wilder (1954) reviewed studies of teacher effectiveness conducted between 1902-1952. Since their report several studies in this area have been reported each year. Student teaching and early professional experience standout as being extremely influential in the development of professionally competent, effective and satisfied teachers (Ellis, 1961). The evolution of the specific concern for the professional difficulties of teachers is documented by Eddins (1930) "Why Teachers Fail;" Spears (1945) "What Disturbs the Beginning Teacher;" Wey (1951) "Why Do Beginning Teachers Fail;" and Ellis and Radebaugh (1974).

The study reported here is part of a larger investigation of professional role performance difficulties reported by first year Illinois public school teachers from eight curriculum areas, four levels of instruction and three kinds of communities served. It also serves both as a needs assessment and performance evaluation of first year home economics

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teachers. The results of the study may be of use to those who are involved in the preparation of home economics teachers at the university level and to those school district personnel who conduct supervisory and staff development functions. These findings indicate areas in need of emphasis and/or revision in both preservice and inservice programs for the development of home economics teachers.

Problem. What professional roles and activities do first year home economics teachers in Illinois public schools report that they have difficulty performing? Furthermore, how do these teachers rate and rank the professional difficulties that they report?

Procedures. The study adhered to the descriptive survey method. A list of all first year home economics teachers who were teaching in Illinois public schools (exclusive of the Chicago Public Schools) during the 1980-81 school year was obtained from the Illinois State Board of Education. This list consisted of 73 persons. Near the end of the school year each was mailed the instrument of the study.

The instrument of the study was based on the concept of teacher role performance (Kinney, 1952) and a scale developed by Ellis and Radebaugh (1974). For purposes of the study, teacher difficulties were operationally defined as those difficulties which teachers perceive themselves to have in the performance of their professional roles and activities at a level of success satisfactory to them.

In addition to permitting these home economics teachers to provide an anonymous written indication of difficulties experienced in performing activities as unique to teaching home economics, they were also permitted to report on difficulties encountered in performing each of seven roles common to public school teachers. These seven roles are briefly described as follows:

Role I. The Teacher as Planner

Teachers identify and assess the needs and problems of both students and society. They identify, assess and state clearly defensible instructional objectives. They plan and develop appropriate learning materials and activities. They plan to assess and evaluate performance. They communicate and report the progress and needs of students. They plan for all of these activities to take place.

Role II. The Teacher as Director and Helper of Learning

Teachers work to help students learn. They plan, make decisions and take actions. They constantly and reflectively evaluate each activity and occurrence. Their actions involve getting ready for learning, interacting with the students and assessing both students and society.

Role III. The Teacher as Counselor and Guide to the Student

Throughout the entire mediating or teaching process teachers also give behavioral evidence that they believe in the students' potential as persons. Teachers work with students who have unique needs and problems which include a personal, social, emotional, moral, physical and intellectual nature. Teachers demonstrate an awareness of the complexity of the individuality in his totality.

Role IV. The Teacher as Mediator and Interpretor of the Culture

Teachers and students belong to a specific culture which necessitates conscious awareness and critical examination. Teachers are responsible in a unique way to communicate clearly and reflectively the culture.

Role V. The Teacher as a Link with the Community

Teachers and students are a part of a cultural setting

and both are involved with the culture through community needs, happenings, interpretations and customs. The very service and art of teaching necessarily link teachers to the community and the community to the teachers. Teachers help translate community values, needs and goals into school programs and communicate school programs to the community.

Role VI. The Teacher as a Member of Teaching Profession

As a member of the teaching profession, teachers advocate and practice professional autonomy including the freedom to teach and to learn. They accept responsibility for their professional judgments, acts and conduct. They continue their professional growth and contribute to the further development of the profession.

Role VII. The Teacher as a Member of the School Community

As a member of the school community teachers relate to and share experiences with students, administrators, supervisors, other teachers and support personnel. They share in the general duties and responsibilities of the school and participate in efforts to improve the quality of programs and life in the school.

Findings. Of the seventy-three questionnaires sent to first year home economics teachers in Illinois public schools, thirty-eight (52 percent) were completed and returned. A summary of responses to this instrument appears in the narrative and tables which follows.

All of these who responded reported that they were female and assigned to teach in an area for which they were certified. Respondents were teaching at either grades seven through nine (39.4 percent) or grades ten through twelve (60.6 percent). They were employed mostly by school districts that served rural/small town (60.6 percent) and suburban (27.3 percent) communities. It should be noted that a directory of first year teachers for the 1980-81 school year was not avail-

able for the Chicago Public Schools when the study was begun; thus, the population did not include teachers from that large urban school district.

When requested to indicate the degree of difficulty that they experienced performing six professional activities as these activities appeared unique in teaching home economics, respondents reported that they had the most difficulty with "obtaining instructional equipment, supplies and materials" and the least difficulty in "providing a broad range of kinds of content and activities." For four of these six activities, more than 50 percent of the teachers reported that they had difficulty performing the activity. (See Table I).

As they were completing their first year of teaching these home economics teachers were asked to rate, in order and in terms of the degree of difficulty encountered, activities inherent in the performance of seven professional roles. Additionally, they were asked to provide an overall rating of the degree of difficulty that they had experienced with each role. (See Table II). Respondents were also encouraged to make relevant comments for each role.

An examination of the data presented in Table II indicates that in two of the seven roles more than 50 percent of the responding home economics teachers encounter difficulty. The role that was reported to have given them the greatest difficulty was "the teacher as a link with the community" (77.6 percent) and it was followed by the "the teacher as a mediator and interpretor of the culture" (68.3 percent). The

TABLE 1

First Year Illinois Public School Home Economics Teachers' Repocts of Diffficulties Encountered When Performing Professional Activities as Unique to Their Teaching

N = 38*

Teaching Activities	Degree of Difficulty Reported							
	Little or None		Mod-erate		Consid-erable		Extreme	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Working in a "main-streamed situation.	12	38.7	12	38.7	7	22.6	0	0.0
Managing learning lab-oratory settings.	16	48.5	13	39.4	4	12.1	0	0.0
Obtaining instructional equipment, supplies and materials.	11	33.3	13	39.4	7	21.1	2	6.1
Providing career educa-tion related to home economics.	19	57.6	8	24.2	6	18.2	0	0.0
Working in extra class activities.	15	46.9	10	31.3	6	18.8	1	3.1
Providing a broad range of kinds of con-tent and activities.	19	59.4	8	25.0	5	15.6	0	0.0

* All respondents did not respond to all items.

TABLE II

First Year Illinois Public School Home Economics Teachers' Ratings of Their Professional Role Performance Difficulties

N = 38*

Teacher Professional Roles	Role Performance Difficulty Rating							
	Little or None		Moderate		Considerable		Extreme	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The teacher as planner.	20	54.1	16	43.2	1	2.7	0	0.0
The teacher as director and helper of learning.	20	54.1	15	40.5	2	5.4	0	0.0
The teacher as counselor and guide to the student.	21	56.8	12	32.4	4	10.8	0	0.0
The teacher as a mediator and interpretor of the culture.	15	41.7	20	55.6	1	2.8	0	0.0
The teacher as a link with the community.	12	32.4	21	56.8	3	8.1	1	2.7
The teacher as a member of the teaching profession.	26	72.2	8	22.2	1	2.8	1	2.8
The teacher as a member of the school community.	30	83.3	4	11.1	1	2.8	1	2.8

* All respondents did not respond to all items.

role that was reported to have given the least difficulty was "the teacher as a member of the school community" (16.7 percent) and it was followed by "the teacher as a member of the teaching profession" (27.8 percent).

A discussion of the difficulties the respondents reported that they had encountered in performing specific activities associated with each of the seven roles follows. For the role teacher as a planner particular difficulties were reported for the activities involving "establishing relevant and clear objectives" and "planning for assessing and evaluating performance." In both of these activities, over two-thirds of the teachers reported having difficulty. Several respondents provided comments relating to their role as a planner. The comments indicated that much of their planning was based on trial and error, sometimes overdone and involved adapting to new materials. Some comments indicated a difficulty in defining the teacher's role and in maintaining empathy with students. A need for learning how to evaluate their program was expressed as was the desire to revise their plans for their second year of teaching.

When considering the role teacher as director and helper of learning, nearly two thirds of the respondents indicated that they had the most difficulty with activities of "managing the classroom and handling problems of pupil control" and with "using motivating activities." Respondents provided many comments about their role as director and helper of learning. These comments generally expressed difficulties in testing

and evaluating student achievement, controlling the classroom situation and motivating students to achieve and enjoy their school work.

For the role teacher as counselor and guide to the student, the respondents reported their greatest difficulty to involve "using evaluative techniques to gain awareness of students' needs." (70.3 percent) Comments relating to this role provided by respondents indicated difficulties in getting to know students well, establishing rapport with them and in implementing some of the techniques of counseling.

When considering the role teacher as mediator and interpretor of the culture, the respondents reported that they had the most difficulty with activites of "helping students identify and interpret important values", "helping students develop interest in and appreciation for democracy as a way of life" and "encouraging and facilitating student democratic involvement in school and community affairs." Respondents' comments related to this role expressed difficulties with understanding the value system prevailing in their school, the existence of little opportunity to foster democratic involvement in the school or community and a lack of interest in current events among high school students. Some respondents said that extra class activities facilitated their implementation of the role of mediator and interpretor of the culture.

In performing the role teacher as a link with the community, the respondents indicated particular difficulties with the activities of "encouraging critical thinking in dealing with community values, needs, goals and problems" (70.3 per-

cent) and "participating with the public and others in developing educational goals and implementing programs to achieve goals." (75.7 percent) Comments presented by respondents relating to this role expressed three thoughts. First, first year teachers are often new to the community and may have difficulty getting to know and to become involved in the community; "it takes time." Secondly, student behavior problems may constrain the use of community resources in school programs. Thirdly, a lack of adequate communications between the school and community was seen as causing teachers difficulties in performing the role of a link with the community.

When considering the role teacher as a member of the teaching profession, these home economics teachers reported their greatest difficulty to be participating in and contributing to professional organizations." (64.9 percent) Respondents' comments regarding this role indicated some difficulty in affording the cost of dues for professional organizations and learning "how things tick" in the school district while a first year teacher.

When considering the role teacher as a member of the school community, respondents reported the most difficult activity for them to be "participating in the planning, development, evaluation and improvement of school programs" (52.8 percent). Comments made by respondents regarding this role indicated difficulties due to a lack of experience in evaluating programs, a lack of support from teachers with supervisory responsibilities and a lack of support by principals.

After identifying and rating difficulties in their professional performance, the first year home economics teachers who formed the population of the study were asked to rank in order of difficulty the seven professional roles that gave structure to the study. In Table III the results of their ranking appear with similar rankings provided by first year teachers from seven other curricular areas in Illinois. Thus, the data in Table III allow a comparison to be made between and among eight curriculum areas from which role performance difficulty rankings were obtained.

From an examination of these rankings it will be noted that the home economics teachers ranked the roles "mediators and interpretors of the culture" and "link with the community" as their first and second most difficult roles while the roles "members of the teaching profession" and "member of the school community" were ranked as their least and next to least difficult roles. When the rankings presented by the home economics teachers are compared with those made by teachers in seven other curricular areas, a strickingly similar pattern prevails regarding the two roles reported to be the most difficult (mediator of the culture and link with the community) and the two roles reported to be the least difficult (member of the profession and member of the school community).

Conclusions. Although the study reported here was designed to focus on teacher difficulties, first year home economics teachers in Illinois public schools during the

TABLE III

Professional Role Performance Difficulties Ranked in Order of Difficulty by First Year Illinois Public School Teachers from Eight Curricular Areas

Professional Roles	Role Ranked in Order of Difficulty Encountered by Teachers of:							
	Home Econ.	English	Math	Physical Educ.	Science	Social Studies	Special Educ.	Art
	N = 38	N = 49	N = 31	N = 32	N = 47	N = 13	N = 150	N = 34
The teacher as planner.	4	4	5	4	3	3	4	6
The teacher as director and helper of learning.	5	2	4	5	4	1	6	4
The teacher as counselor and guide to the learner.	3	5	3	3	5	5	3	2
The teacher as mediator and interpretor of the culture.	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	3
The teacher as a link with the community.	2	3	1	1	1	4	2	1
The teacher as a member of the teaching profession.	7	6	7	6	7	6	7	7
The teacher as a member of the school community.	6	7	6	7	6	7	5	5

1980-81 school year reported little or no difficulty in performing most of their profesional roles and activities. Especially these teachers indicated that they had little difficulty performing the roles of "member of the teaching profession" and "member of the school community".

While these home economics teachers reported considerable difficulty in obtaining needed instructional equipment, materials and supplies, in working with "mainstreamed" students and in working in extra class activities, another set of reported difficulties appears to be far more serious and fundamental for American education and also much harder to overcome. This second set of difficulties forms a pattern involving roles and activities having to do with the relationship of the school and community, facilitating the development of values, establishing goals and objectives, fostering critical thinking among learners, helping learners relate democracy and life experiences and determining the worth of experience.

Recommendations. Home economics educators and others in the universities and public schools who are concerned with the professional development of home economics teachers should take a careful look at the results of this and related studies to find a basis for both preservice and inservice education program revisions. A study similar to the one reported here should be conducted by individual school districts every few years and involve all of the district's teachers.

More specifically, school administrators should devise actions to be taken almost immediately to minimize those difficulties that the teachers reported to involve obtaining instructional equipment and materials, working with "mainstreamed" students and working with extra class activities. Home economics educators, professors of education, school administrators and home economics teachers should review those reported difficulties that involve determining values, establishing goals and objectives, school and community relationships, fostering critical thinking and democracy and the evaluative process. This should be done with the intent of providing long range preservice and inservice programs that address these difficulties.

It is recommended that the reports provided by the first year home economics teachers in this study should be used as feedback and direction for much of the substance of their staff development. However, the specific mechanisms and procedures by which this and the other recommendations presented here might be reviewed and, where warranted, implemented, must be determined by those in positions of accountability for staff and program improvement.

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